

# Bird festival, 'estuary soup' recipes for environmental education

## MV youth visit Padilla Bay Reserve

Submitted by **KELLY SPRUTE**  
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**BAY VIEW** — Getting people outdoors to experience nature up close requires a bit of ingenuity and determination, and a helping of estuary soup.

Although the day started in typical Puget Sound fashion, rainy and overcast, more than 100 people attended the first Migratory Bird Festival April 24 at Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

A number of natural resource agencies sponsored an outing for elders and youth from the International District in Seattle and youth with the Kulshan Creek Neighborhood Kids program, which exposes Hispanic children from Mount Vernon to the outdoors and to careers in natural sciences.

"The appreciation of nature is connection I want them to go



Kelly Sprute / U.S. Forest Service

**Irene Situ and Sokam Tom of Seattle** use a spotting scope to view birds April 24 at the first-ever Migratory Bird Festival held at the Padilla Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve.

home with," said Jim Chu, international programs specialist with the U.S. Forest Service.

Festival workers set up three stations for visitors to learn about the estuary and wildlife, showing different aspects of a

healthy ecosystem. Festivalgoers viewed shorebirds at the dike trail and learned about the importance of a healthy forest for migrating birds at the forest trail.

The migration station was a

*"The appreciation of nature is the connection I want them to go home with."*

**Jim Chu, U.S. Forest Service**  
international programs specialist

hit. Water, salt, detritus, eel grass and other ingredients were crowded onto a chef's cart to make "estuary soup."

The recipe is only as good as the ingredients, according to the head chef Glen Alexander, education director at the Padilla Bay Interpretive Center.

"Every estuary needs three things: salt water, fresh water and land partially surrounding it. The water has to be healthy. Forests act as a natural filter for water entering. But you need to be careful about what goes down the drain. We all want healthy

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## Festival

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shrimp, clams and salmon to eat," he said.

The bottom of Padilla Bay is shallow, flat and muddy from sediments deposited by the Skagit River, making for the perfect growing environment for eelgrass.

Nearly 8,000 acres of it grows in the bay, providing a home and nursery for salmon, crabs, perch and herring. Millions of worms, shrimp, clams and other invertebrates fill the bay and become food for blue herons, eagles, otters and humans.

The forest trail gave a glimpse of the forest ecosystem providing food and habitat for animals.

"Birds play a key role in keeping our forests free from insect infestations," said Libby Mills, festival instructor. "If trees leaf out before birds arrive, insects can damage the leaves, harming and killing the trees," she said.

Walking along the trail, children spotted a banana slug, and signs of bird life and a coyote. One young man shouted, "It smells so 'outside,'" prompting a group laugh.